DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 365 785 CE 065 364

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TITLE Relationship between Perceived Leadership Ability and Aspiration Levels of High School Students.
PUB DATE 93
NOTE 17p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Age Differences; *Aspiration; *Correlation; Grade Point Average; *Home Economics; *Leadership Qualities; Secondary Education; *Secondary School Students; *Self Concept; *Self Evaluation (Individuals); Sex Differences
IDENTIFIERS Dimensions of Self Concept

ABSTRACT

A study examined the relationship between self-perceived leadership ability and aspiration levels among 262 randomly selected consumer and home economic students in grades 7 through 12. The Dimensions of Self Concept (DOSC) questionnaire and a demographic survey instrument were administered to the students to gather data on their gender, age, and grade point average (GPA). Next, descriptive statistics were used to depict the distribution of self-concept, correlational statistics were used to explore the relationship between the five subscales of the DOSC, and analysis of variance was used to identify the effects of sex, age, and GPA. A moderate correlation (.52) between student aspiration levels and perceived leadership and initiative ability was found. According to the analysis of variance, GPA was statistically significant for the Leadership and Initiative subscale of the DOSC. In the case of the Level of Aspiration subscale, gender, age, and GPA were all significant. The students included in this pilot study were found to be comparable to those of the DOSC norming group. (Contains 14 references.) (MN)

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ED 365 785

Relationship Between Perceived Leadership Ability and Aspiration Levels of High School Students

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Running Head: Perceived Leadership Ability

CE 065 364

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Abstract

This study determined the distribution of student self-concept measured along two dimensions, perceived leadership ability and aspiration levels, among 300 randomly selected seventh to twelfth grade students. Correlation between these two dimensions was explored. The effects of gender, age, and grade point average on each dimension were examined. The Dimensions of Self-Concept (DOSC) questionnaire (consisting of five sub-scales) and a demographic instrument were used for data collection. The study utilized descriptive statistics to depict the distribution of self-concept, correlational statistics to investigate the relationship between the sub-scales, and analysis of variance to examine the effects of sex, age, and grade point average. Significant findings included GPA being significant for both sub-scales and gender being significant for the *Level of Aspiration* sub-scale. The interaction of gender, age, and GPA also produced significant main effects on *Level of Aspiration* sub-scale.

Relationship Between Perceived Leadership Ability and Aspiration Levels of High School Students

Previous research seems to indicate student self-perceptions of leadership ability and aspiration level may be important predictors of future academic or employment success (White & Sedlacek, 1986; Busse, 1991; Martinez, 1991). Secondary school students today are faced with entering a work force where employers are requiring their entry-level employees not simply to be proficient in the technical skills required by the job, but also to have confidence in themselves and exhibit adequate social skills (Busse, 1991; Martinez, 1991). Social skills would include such things as being team players, using effective interpersonal communication, and being good listeners and quick thinkers. Robinson and Shannon (1993) examined the work ethic of high school students, finding that the social orientation of students was inversely correlated to age and grade point average. As students became older and their GPA increased, they were more likely to regard the social aspect of work more intrinsically, processing their environment for themselves and depending less on society to define their roles in the workplace.

The challenge of being confident individuals, capable of effectively communicating with and guiding others exists for students whether they go to work immediately after high school or continue their formal education. Students continuing their education beyond high school encounter a demanding post-secondary environment--an environment where successful leadership and positive self-concept

have been found to be useful predictors of GPA and retention status (White & Sedlacek, 1986).

Caliguri (1988) explored student perceptions on leadership and communications skills, finding significant differences between interpersonal communication scores and the variables of age and sex. Lee (1984) investigated psycho-social variables in the occupational aspirations of rural adolescents and obtained results indicating race, gender and self-concept to be variables affecting occupational aspirations. However, McNair and Brown (1983) did not find race to be an effective predictor of aspiration. While gender and self-concept may affect aspirations, translating these aspirations into reality may not be as affected by the variables. No appreciable difference in persistence in post-secondary education was found in relation to gender or ethnicity (Cooper & Michael, 1990).

Other studies also cast doubt on gender and ethnicity as variables in predicting school success. For example, results from a study by Breeding and others (1979) suggested that culture is more important than sex in determining school success. School success, as defined by academic achievement, was found to have a strong correlation with both educational self-concept and with future aspirations (Griffore & Parsons, 1983). According to Nagel & Jones (1992), high self-concept may assist adolescents in dealing with social pressures. In contrast, poor self-concept and low aspirations were found to be integral parts of the profile of the potential high school dropout (Self, 1985).

It may be that leadership ability and aspiration levels as components of self-concept are fixed prior to participation in post-secondary education or in employment. This was supported in a Rand Corporation study (Kanouse & others, 1980) which suggested that the post-secondary experience generally had little effect on attitudes and aspirations. Brody (1984) found self-concept to be a stable, central core of the personality. However, Dunlop and Canale (1988) established that females tend to lower their career aspirations as they progressed through formal education.

Need for Study

For decades, educators have debated the reason some students exhibit leadership skills and aspire to do well in school while others seem to be content with their present academic performance, having little desire to be a leader. Could this phenomenon be related to social conditioning, or could this be a function of the developmental stage of junior and senior high school students? Do the characteristics of gender, age and grade point average or a combination of these affect one's ability to be a leader and to aspire to academic advancement? If leadership is defined as " . . . the process of persuasion or example . . ." (Gardner, 1987, p. 16, cited in Robinson & Walters, 1993) and if student perceptions of leadership ability and aspirations often affect their vocational and academic options and the success with they pursue them, then a better understanding of students' self-concept and of the factors (variables) contributing to the development of leadership skills and higher academic aspiration is important.

Purpose

The overall purpose of this pilot study was to investigate two dimensions of self-concept among high school students: leadership ability and aspiration levels. Specifically, this pilot study explored the distribution of student self-concept measured along two dimensions of self-concept, perceived leadership ability and aspiration levels, among 300 randomly selected seventh to twelfth grade students. The correlation between these two dimensions was explored. The effects of gender, age, and grade point average on each dimension were also examined.

Methodology

Subjects

Subjects for this pilot study consisted of 262 vocational consumer and homemaking home economics students in grades 7 through 12. The majority of these subjects were female (n=204; 77.9%) and ranged in age from 12 through 18 years. Thirty-nine percent (n=102) reported having a grade point average of a C or better (Table 1). Most (n=162; 61.8%) were involved in some type of extra curricular activity with 50 percent (n= 131) being members of a youth organization.

Instrumentation

Two instruments were used for data collection: the *Dimensions of Self Concept (DOSC)* (Michael, Smith, & Michael, 1989) and a demographic data sheet. The DOSC was designed to measure non-cognitive factors associated with self-esteem or self concept in a school setting. Form S, designed for high school students, was selected for this study.

Table 1	Profile of Subjects		
Variable		N	Percent
Gender:	Female	204	77.9
	Male	58	22.1
Age:	12	19	47.0
	13	47	17.9
	14	41	15.6
	15	42	16.0
	16	32	12.2
	17	50	19.1
	18	31	11.8
GPA:	A	1	.4
	B	13	5.3
	C	88	38.9
	D	111	42.4
	F	49	18.7

DOSC scales measured self-concept along five factor-dimensions, or sub-scales: (a) Level of Aspiration (ASP); (b) Anxiety (ANX); (c) Academic Interest and Satisfaction (AIS); (d) Leadership and Initiative (LAI); and (e) Identification versus Alienation (IVA). Each of the five sub-scales contained 14 Likert-type items: 5=always, 4=very often, 3=half of the time, 2=Seldom, 1=Never. A high score was indicative of a high aspiration level or a positive perception of leadership ability. Content validity of the DOSC was established during instrument development, as

reported in the literature (Caracosta and Michael, 1986; Lehn, Vladovic, & Michael, 1980; Michael and Smith, 1976).

For this pilot study, the sub-scales *Level of Aspiration* and *Leadership and Initiative* were used. The *Level of Aspiration* factor-dimension is ". . . a manifestation of patterns of behavior that portray the degree to which achievement levels and academic activities of students are consistent with their perceptions of their potentialities in terms of scholastic aptitude or of past and current attainments . . ." (Michael, Smith, & Michael, 1989, p. 2). *Leadership and Initiative* is a factor-dimension which represents ". . . those behavior patterns and perceptions that are associated with star-like qualities . . ." (Michael, Smith, & Michael, 1989, p. 2). Such patterns involve demonstration of mastery of knowledge, helping others, directing group activities, becoming a respected expert figure, putting forth suggestions for classroom activities, etc.

Cronbach's coefficient alpha of internal consistency was used to determine reliability of the DOSC and the two sub-scales investigated. The overall DOSC reliability was estimated at .78, with the reliabilities of the two sub-scales being .68 and .75 for *Level of Aspiration* and *Leadership and Initiative*, respectively (Table 2). Although sub-scale reliabilities for this sample are somewhat lower than those reported in the original study, these reliability estimates are within a satisfactory range.

The demographic data sheet consisted of seven forced field items. The items were gender, ethnic origin, age, grade level, class period, extra curricula activities and grade point average.

Table 2
Summary of Reliabilities for *Dimensions of Self-Concept* Sub-Scales

Scale	N	Mean	SD	Alpha
Level of Aspiration	262	49.57	9.72	.68
Anxiety	262	38.23	7.87	.86
Academic Interest and Satisfaction	262	42.86	8.55	.70
Leadership and Initiative	262	38.51	9.30	.76
Identification vs Alienation	262	45.31	9.10	.69
Total DOSC Scale	262	214.48	32.89	.78

Data Collection

Eleven home economics classes were randomly selected for this pilot study. Each student was administered the *Dimensions of Self Concept (DOSC)* and was asked to complete the demographic data sheet during a selected class period, normally 55 minutes. Both the DOSC and the demographic data sheet were given to the students. Directions which described how to answer the questions were then read aloud to the class by their teacher, who administered the instrument. The students returned the completed instrument to their teacher. Of the 300 instruments distributed, 262 were returned to the teachers in a usable condition.

Analysis of Data

The study utilized descriptive statistics to depict the distribution of self-concept along the two sub-scales, *Leadership and Initiative* and *Level of Aspiration*. Correlational statistics were employed to investigate the relationship between the sub-scales. Separate ANOVAs were also performed for each of the two sub-scales to determine the effects of the independent variables sex, age, and grade point average on each sub-scale.

Results

The mean for the sub-scale *Leadership and Initiative* for this sample was 38.51 of a possible total score of 70. This mean, which was at the 36th percentile, was congruous with the mean of the DOSC norming group. The aspiration level for this group of students was also moderate. For the sub-scale *Level of Aspiration*, the mean for this sample was 49.57, which was also consistent with the mean of the DOSC norming group, which was at the 50th percentile.

When the relationship between the two sub-scales *Level of Aspiration* and *Leadership and Initiative* was examined, the results showed a moderate correlation of .52 between student aspiration levels and perceived leadership and initiative ability. Student perceptions of their ability to lead, assist and involved others in activities increased as their desire to achieve better academically increased. This finding was similar to that reported by Michael, Smith, and Michael (1989).

Separate ANOVAs were performed for each of the two sub-scales being examined. The effects of the independent variables gender, age, and grade point

average were determined for the sub-scale *Leadership and Initiative* and the sub-scale *Level of Aspiration*. The results of these are given in Table 3.

Table 3
Summary of ANOVAs for *Dimensions of Self-Concept* Sub-scales

Sub-scale	Sex (A)	Age (B)	GPA (C)	AxBxCx	Within
Leadership & Initiative					
Mean Square		279.05	466.76	211.51	79.12
F Ratio	49.48 .63		*5.90	*2.67	
		3.53			
Level of Aspiration					
Mean		282.38	309.95	355.66	77.87
F Ratio	1919.46 *24.65		*3.98	*4.57	
		3.63			

For the sub-scale *Leadership and Initiative*, there was one significant main effect, GPA. Follow-on tests were conducted because the initial ANOVA showed no significant interaction between the variables. GPAs were grouped in four categories from low to high. A ONEWAY procedure (SPSS) showed significant differences among GPA groups in terms of scores on the LAI sub-scale (F ratio computed 8.2214, F prob. .000). Contrasting the GPA groups, the highest GPA group was significantly different from the combined other groups (T prob. .000) and from the lowest group (T prob. .004). A multiple-range test using the Scheffe procedure also found a significant difference at an alpha level of .05 between the highest GPA group and the lower groups in terms of scores on the LAI sub-scale. While the highest GPA group had the widest range of LAI scores (14-70), it had the highest mean LAI score of 44.08.

Three significant main effects were found for the sub-scale *Level of Aspiration*. These included effects produced by the independent variables gender and GPA considered separately and a significant main effect produced by interaction between gender, age and GPA.

Discussion

Although each sub-scale mean was reasonable, the mean for the *Leadership and Initiative* (LAI) sub-scale was somewhat higher than the mean for the *Level of Aspiration* (ASP) sub-scale. The lower mean for the ASP sub-scale, indicative of setting lower academic and career goals, may be the function of low self-esteem. By establishing a somewhat low level for goal attainment, a student may be attempting to insulate him- or herself against possible failure, either presently or in the future. As a result, the development of positive attitudes toward leadership roles and acknowledgment of accomplishments may be hampered. In the present pilot study, subjects who had higher expectations academically appeared to be more likely to perceive their leadership ability more positively.

There was a significant main effect for GPA on *Leadership and Initiative*. As expected, it appeared that those with higher GPAs perceived their leadership ability more positively than did those in the other GPA categories. Good grades are customarily associated with success and a higher self-concept. Since one's perceived leadership ability is one dimension of self-concept, it is reasonable that students with higher GPAs would view their leadership potential more positively.

Gender produced a significant main effect on the sub-scale Level of Aspiration. Proportionally, more females aspired higher academically than did their male counterparts. Another main effect for this sub-scale was GPA. The interaction between gender, age, and GPA produced a significant main effect. Younger females and older males appeared to have higher levels of aspiration. Literature supports the theory that societal conditioning may be responsible, in part, for females in the younger group and males in the older group aspiring higher. According to Dunlop and Canale (1984), females are predisposed to lower their career aspirations as they get older. Results reported in this pilot study, particularly results pertaining to the female population, are supportive of this premise. When considering the aspiration levels of younger females to aspirations held by older females in this pilot study, it could be postulated that the career interest of this female population, would fit the model of career aspirations identified by Dunlop and Canale (1984). These findings, coupled with results from a study by Breeding and others (1979) in which culture was found to be important in anticipating school achievement, give further credence to the postulation that the subjects in this pilot study may be products of their social environment.

Another premise offered as an explanation of the findings from the current pilot study is consideration of the stage of development of the subjects. Females often mature earlier than males, particularly during the junior high years, or the 12 to 14 age group. As a result, girls may take the leading role in class and social group activities. As both males and females continue to mature, males may tend to become

more assertive, assuming more leadership positions during the later high school years in preparation for their roles in society as the primary wage earners.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Self-concept is a complex issue particularly among adolescents. The integral sub-parts of self-concept, such as leadership and academic comfort levels, are interrelated and difficult to examine in isolation from the other component parts. However, when examining the results of this pilot study and comparing these findings to those of the DOSC norming group, participants in this study are typical of comparable groups.

Although this pilot study gave some insight into two dimensions of self concept (i.e., perceived leadership ability and aspiration levels), dimensions outside the realm of the current study need to be explored. Variables other than those investigated may be influencing the perceived self-concept of high school students especially in the area of aspiration. Although further post-hoc analysis would be helpful in determining specific main effects of the various levels of the independent variables examined, a longitudinal study would enhance the depth of understanding needed to fully comprehend the magnitude and intricacy of self-concept among adolescents.

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